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Dr. Kevin Hylton (Reader)  
Social Science of Sport, Leisure and PE  
Carnegie Faculty  
Leeds Metropolitan University  
[k.hylton@leedsmet.ac.uk](mailto:k.hylton@leedsmet.ac.uk)

## **Talk the Talk, Walk the Walk: Defining Critical Race Theory in Research**

### **Introduction**

This paper focuses on what constitutes a Critical Race Theory (CRT) methodology. Over the last decade there has been a noticeable growth in published works citing CRT in the UK. This has led to an increase in practical research projects utilising CRT as their framework. It is clear that research on 'race' is an emerging topic of study recently encapsulated by the work of Seidman (2004), Bulmer and Solomos (2004), Gunaratnam (2003), Denzin and Giardina (2006; 2007), Tuhiwai Smith (2006), and Denzin, Lincoln and Tuhiwai-Smith (2008). What is less visible is a debate on how CRT is positioned in relation to the 'nexus of methodic practice, substantive theory and epistemological underpinnings that is a methodology' (Harvey 1990:1). These philosophical, ethical, and practical questions are initially considered here by examining the notions of ontology, epistemology and methodology before practical considerations of recognising, framing and applying CRT research methodologies are explored.

Tweed (2006: 20) suggests that theories, in the first sense of the word, are 'travels' and yet the journey to CRT<sup>1</sup> for many, has inevitably engaged and rejected many mainstream theoretical frameworks, pairing down, adapting and moulding ideas until settling with CRT (cf. Dockery 2000). CRT for many is a framework that explains issues and isolates realities in a way that many critical theories struggle with. Tyson (2003: 20) succinctly summarises how her experience and understanding of her everyday world led her to use CRT when she said,

It is the understanding of lived oppression—the struggle to make a way out of no way—which propels us to problematise dominant ideologies in which knowledge is constructed.

CRT like other substantive critical theoretical frameworks is determined by an ontological position best outlined by its commonly held tenets and eloquently brought to life by Tyson. CRT's major premise is that society is fundamentally racially stratified and unequal, where power processes systematically disenfranchise racially oppressed people. Accordingly, we have a society where some are more likely to be looking up from 'the bottom' than others as a consequence of their background. Ontological positions ensure that activist-

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting here that CRT is a theoretical framework rather than 'a theory'.

scholars remain conscious of the crucial social processes that structure their worlds and that they are prepared to consistently look 'to the bottom' for answers as well as questions.

CRT scholars are motivated with taking these ideas forward as the starting point for antiracist, anti-subordination, social justice and social transformation activities. Importantly, such ideas apply to the research, epistemologies and methodologies that inform them. Where racism and the distribution of power and resources disproportionately marginalise racialised people's position in society, CRT ensures that they remain central to research investigations or critical lenses rather than at convenient margins. Where power and status is stacked against those groups that have been marginalised, Dockery (2000) is not afraid to say that he feels it is necessary to 'take sides' if they gain some advantage from his research. His aim to reduce practices that exacerbate inequality and racial hierarchies are in step with the ontological perspective taken by numerous CRT researchers such as Tyson above, Parker et al (1999), Lopez and Parker (2003), Matsuda et al. (1993), Dixson and Rousseau (2006).

Currently many researchers are asking challenging questions by utilising off-shoots of CRT such as Critical Race Feminism (CRF), and Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) in ways that centre particular problematics. These emergent fields of scholarship are developing critical centres of interest. Other off-shoots of CRT are well documented and reflect core issues for activist scholars informed by CRT and their own lived experience (Delgado and Stefancic 1999). CRT has influenced research that have become more popular in Britain, these include Whiteness critiques incorporating Cultural analysis (Chakrabarty, 2011), Whiteness and Policy Analysis (Preston, 2008; Gillborn, 2005, 2008); Theoretical Critiques of CRT and Class (Warmington, 2011; Cole, 2011); and Theoretical Critiques of Policy (Pilkington, 2011; Gillborn 2006); Pedagogy and classroom counter-narratives (Housee, 2008); and the Black experience of Sport and Leisure (Burdsey, 2011; Hylton, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2011). Many of these studies have engaged with education policy and practice and it is reasonable to argue that it was here rather than the legal profession where the original site of struggle for CRT in the UK began. It is likely that as 'crits' have developed in the US to respond to specific social issues then the UK is likely to develop its own account of UK and transnational issues as CRT is applied more widely.

In earlier studies, before CRT emerged in the UK, I drew my influences for methodologies from critical theoretical studies in fields related to critical black studies (Hylton 2003). However, in a comparative study of race equality in local government, like Dockery (2000) and Dunbar (2008), I came to the conclusion that traditional approaches to critical policy studies were incomplete and requiring a more critical 'race' focused perspective that spoke to my lived experience of equality in the public sector. In relation to this, Ladson-Billings and Donnor (2008) talk about the constant reminders they get of their 'otherness'

which they term 'waiting for the call'<sup>2</sup>, and like Dunbar's ontological position, *for as long as I can remember 'race' has been my center* (2008: 89). CRT offered a theoretical frame that enhanced my critical lens and enabled me to draw from other scholars unafraid to make bold statements about, and challenge, the racialised order of things.

In addition to local and central government, academia is affected by naturalised systems of order, especially where praxis is flawed due to epistemological (in)consistencies that make claims to the nature and order of valid knowledge and science. CRT implies a critical epistemological root, though knowledge development has suffered from mainstream agendas that have neglected and negated new and emergent forms of research. For example Dunbar's (2008) observations of the precarious nature of researchers, and research, on 'race' reflects more their position in the academy than the quality of their scholarship. Epistemologies are a result of social practices where power is being exercised that can reinforce colourblind, 'race' neutral, ahistorical, and apolitical points of view. Leading Duncan (2006) to argue that this process is how oppression and inequality may appear 'natural'. Delgado-Bernal (2002) concurs as she explores how the use of a critical race gendered epistemology can acknowledge black people as holders and legitimate sources of knowledge where Eurocentric epistemologies consistently fail. Knaus (2009) applies this principle in the classroom to facilitate the 'voicing' of black students, as Flores and Garcia (2009) use this approach to create safe spaces for Latina students in predominantly white institutions in higher education. Using the experiences of black people being centred and seen as valid knowledge in understanding their marginalization, alienation and power relations is now a common theme in CRT. Developing these ideas further, Goldberg's (1993: 150) view that power is exercised epistemologically in the dual practices of naming and evaluating, is best articulated in the research and knowledge that inform us. In practice, a CRT methodology can challenge narrow ideologies and this should be traceable through its implementation back to its theoretical roots.

A CRT methodology should in part be characterized by its ability to eschew the passive reproduction of established practices, knowledge and resources, that make up the way types of research have been traditionally carried out. The 'one size fits all' (Carter 2003: 31) myth is demystified at the same time as contributions to new and emergent forms of knowing become valuable outcomes of developing CRT methodologies. Collins (1990) and Dunbar (2008) exemplify this debate as they charge white social science with struggling to maintain the mantle of the vehicle in which to effectively explore issues pertaining to 'race' in society. Where Dunbar urges a challenge to white supremacy and privilege in wider society, Collins specifically urges us to do this by searching for ways to reflect the experiences of black people without borrowing passively from white social science. A CRT approach has the potential to facilitate a challenge to mainstream epistemologies and, consequently, their agendas.

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<sup>2</sup> Even as well respected members of their academic/local communities they realise that there will be regular moments that remind them of their racialised status in society.

Methodology is thus at the point at which method,  
theory and epistemology coalesce in an overt way in  
the process of directly investigating specific instances  
within the social world  
(Harvey, 1990: 1)

To reiterate, the politics of inquiries should be traceable back through **methodologies** to the ideas that underpin them. It is argued here that CRT embraces critical research, though it is wary of their complacency and colour-blindness in that regard. Those researchers that advocate neutrality and objectivity, aligned to conventional views of validity and reliability may not agree that they could be reinforcing racialised inequalities by tolerating only certain forms of knowledge. In relation to neutrality and objectivity, CRT has been critical of mainstream methodologies for being apolitical, and reinforcing oppressions whilst subordinating the voices and values of those rendered invisible through conventional modes of thinking (Parker et al, 1999; Denzin and Giardina, 2007, Denzin, Lincoln, Tuhiwai-Smith, 2009). Tuhiwai-Smith (2006: 2) exemplifies this in her work on indigeneity in the Southern hemisphere as she emphasises the institutional silence and silencing of indigenous peoples/issues. *Research is a site of struggle between the interests and ways of knowing of the West and the interests and ways of resisting of the Other [emphasis added]*.

'Race', class, gender and their intersections have regularly been excluded from important social and political developments and landmarks in knowledge and dominant paradigms. As a result the use of 'voicing', storytelling and counter-storytelling have become popular tools in the expression of a CRT standpoint. Critical race theorists recognise that stories or discourses have been the privilege of those historically influential in knowledge generation and research. Counter-stories however, can present views rarely evidenced in social research. Storytelling still has some weaknesses. Even with their cloaks of validity and reliability stories are socially constructed and can represent limited versions of reality for subjugated people and their everyday experiences, especially where oppressive social arrangements remain unchallenged. In these cases research on 'race' and racism can perpetuate the status quo and cloud the landscape with spurious 'experiences from the margins'. Professional environments too, with their shroud of authenticity, must not remain uncritiqued either because they regularly remain uncontested due to their ability to self perpetuate and validate such practices. CRT methodologies have the potential to contest traditional approaches to critical research especially where previous studies including the social sciences have challenged power relations *without necessarily* challenging racialised ones.

Critical race theorists are adamant that the body of work that informs a CRT epistemology is likely to be broad due to its emphasis on transdisciplinarity. Yet, at the same time, CRT necessitates a coherence of ideas and synchronous principles and propositions that underpin methodologies and resonate with critical race politics. The alternative hegemony of dominant ideas often leaves

power relations uncontested and seemingly incontestable. A critical race consciousness must invigorate these arenas to disrupt the negative racialised relations of late modernity. It can do this by recognising that though CRT is a pragmatic framework and therefore without a pedantic set of methods or methodologies, there are clearly methodologies and approaches that can facilitate CRT politics. Even within this relatively loose set of propositions there are caveats. These revolve around knowledge formation and validation, the nature of 'scientific' rigour, and what constitutes suitable topics for disciplinary lenses.

### **Establishing a CRT Methodology**

CRT's pragmatic politics ensure that no one methodology is privileged, dogma is challenged even amongst activist scholars. However, what makes these agendas similar, as *identifiably CRT* in nature, involves a measure of commitment to social justice and social change, and recognition that 'race' and racism are central factors in the social order. A CRT methodology can be identified by its focus on 'race' and racism and its intersections and a commitment to challenge racialised power relation. For example, Blaisdell's (2009) shift toward using CRT came from an examination of teaching and the sociology of education. Here he came to the conclusion that the empirical research in the sociology of education that challenged liberal ideologies and a range of racisms was inadequate for him to pursue a more proactive transformative agenda. For Blaisdell, the solution was to utilise a CRT approach that challenged the liberalism of educationalists as academics and practitioners.

A question that activist scholars [and external examiners!] are likely to ask is *how has a CRT agenda been centred in this methodology?* The politics of CRT research posit that there must be some impact on (or challenge to) negative racialised relations. Just as Glover (2009), felt able to ask different questions to those traditionally tabled about crime control to ones about racial oppression, it is incumbent upon each activist scholar, or intervention, to explicitly articulate this message. For instance, studies that test the notion of merit and racial equality in local government, racialised professional hierarchies in the accounting profession, racial disparities in stop-and-search techniques by police forces, the experience of under-represented black teachers in UK teacher training, the experience of black children in early years, or even media representations of sporting bodies can all be pursuing some of the agendas of CRT. Therefore there is no one narrow methodological approach, nor a reductionist set of predetermined agendas. However, the *aim* of a study and the *tools* used to implement it will carry CRT researchers in the correct direction, *or otherwise*. By this it is argued that the *methods* and *implementation* of a study are just as significant as its *purpose*. CRT is described as a framework, however it would be more accurate to describe it as praxis, given that it requires a lived activism (Hermes 1999). What better than a research methodology to demonstrate how to walk the walk?

To reiterate, methodologies with a CRT identity are likely to be inclusive of essential criteria and possibly some desirable ones too. Like any theoretical

framework, CRT is recognisable by properties that enable it to be recognised as so. The emphasis on the disruption of racism and negative racialised relations, the centering of 'race' in the problematising of social relations, underpinned by a social justice agenda and the transformation of negative social relations are fundamental to the identity of CRT methodologies. Dependent upon the issue under consideration there will be other elements from CRT that emerge in a more conspicuous fashion that would need to inform our understanding or negation of negative social arrangements. They may be for reasons of a more nuanced understanding of a complex issue in policing, education, the arts, or community work, reflecting the reality of society, presenting us with relatively simple to complex questions requiring responses of relative sophistication. How can a methodology demonstrate its particular focus whilst embracing the spirit of CRT? How can 'race' be centred and not ignored? How can racism or racialisation be challenged as outcomes of a study? Similarly, how can change to negative racialised relations be a likely result at the conclusion of any study?

There are other important questions that need to be asked in relation to what constitutes an identifiable CRT methodology. Researching 'race' is fraught with conceptual minefields that can empower and completely hamstring attempts to research and transform negative racialised relations. Of this issue, Gunaratnam (2003: 5) highlights key questions for CRT research, these are: How can we make decisions about the points at which we 'fix' the meanings of racial and ethnic categories in order to *do* empirical research? Though these issues are not only pertinent to those adopting a CRT approach to research, they are necessarily unavoidable concerns for those who centre 'race' in their scholarly activities. Judgements about the epistemological and political repercussions of utilising this concept have to be made. Similarly the impact of ignoring 'raced' realities is too large an issue to ignore too. For instance, in research concerning *privileging* the black voice, counter-storytelling and chronicling marginalised accounts, a CRT approach should recognise these lived experiences whilst operating an anti-essentialist frame to confront accusations of homogenisation, over-generalisation and reductionism. To ignore these criticisms is to undermine the work of critical race theorists in the most fundamental of ways, and would marginalise even further some of the crucial debates emerging in the social sciences concerning intersectionality and the influence of social and cultural arrangements upon them. As emerging debates, their marginalisation would sideline the developments around 'mixed race' identities, (Song 2004; Song 2010); 'race', class and their intersections (Cole 2009; Gillborn 2009); 'race', gender and their intersections and related debates around intersectionalities (Crenshaw 1995; Crenshaw, Gotanda et al. 1995; Ludvig 2006; Phoenix and Pattynama 2006; Hankivsky, Reid et al. 2010). It is necessary to state that class and gender theories contribute to CRT as they inform the nuances of intersectionality. However, Solorzano and Yosso emphasise the centrality of 'race' and racism in CRT methodologies when they state that,

Critical race theory advances a strategy to foreground and account for the role of race [sic] and racism...and works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of opposing or eliminating other forms of

subordination based on gender, class, sexual orientation, language and national origin.  
(Solorzano and Yosso 2002: 25)

The anti-essentialism of the intersectionality thesis strengthens a CRT framework especially as the CRT emphasis on centering 'race' can be misconstrued as essentialism. Intersectionality is one of the mechanisms used in CRT to emphasise that though the starting point for CRT is 'race' and racism there is no intention to lose sight of the complexities of the intersection of 'race' with the constructed and identity related nature of other forms of oppression. Intersectionality is concerned with the tensions of research that consider single issue research, in addition to examining overlapping and lived axes of oppression (Hankivsky and Christoffersen 2008; Hankivsky, Reid et al. 2010). CRT's emphasis on the advocacy for issues of 'race', not superiority in a hierarchy of oppressions, if carefully considered can be articulated in methodologies.

Intersectionality brings with it a challenge to CRT researchers in terms of how these complex axes of oppression can be adequately conceptualised and incorporated into methodologies, asking new questions that in many cases cannot be explored using conventional means. A CRT methodology can be identified by its attempt to include decolonised counter-narratives that question the nature of ideas whilst contributing to their development. CRT has a history, albeit recent, of presenting new voices to those more established ones as a way to counterbalance traditional perspectives and positions (see Tuhiwai-Smith, 2006:a). In framing the Maori struggle for decolonisation, Tuhiwai-Smith (2006:b) describes five conditions of their struggle that could inform a CRT methodology; a critical consciousness; reimagining the world and our position within it; intersectionality; challenge to the status quo; struggle against imperialist structures. Tuhiwai-Smith's approach to the Maori struggle in New Zealand offers support to an established CRT standpoint and therefore CRT methodology. However, it is also clear in this case that Maori history and reality has been deemed by Maori and other indigenous people to have been generally ignored forcing them to 'prove our own history and to prove the worth of our language and values' (Tuhiwai Smith 2006b: 155). These ideas reflect many of the realities of critical race theorists whose wish to privilege voices ignored in research, to decolonise knowledge, have found it necessary to engage in activist scholarship to transform these conditions.

### **From the Benign to the Malevolent: Everyday CRT Agendas**

In relation to prevalent, everyday or majoritarian stories, the 'benign' field of sport is an example of where popular views of equality, inclusion and 'melting pot' idealism often go unchallenged in research. Black people are regularly profiled in positions of success where in many other professions, outside of entertainment, they are less likely to be so prominent. However, access to sport facilities and services are popularly deemed to be available to all and in the UK the notion of 'sport for all' is a slogan from the 1970s that is still commonly used today. Still there are contradictions; the majoritarian story of sport for all is one



that consistently denies racialised power relations for more commonly held neutral pluralistic discourses. When examined further these myths can be exploded, whilst research on the pluralist notions of unfettered progression for all cannot be evidenced in the scarce ethnic monitoring in governing bodies of sport and sports councils. The majoritarian view is that if there is one area of society that does not need a critical race critique it is sport. A CRT agenda would seek to challenge such views. Because sport is such a major cultural commodity to implicate it in racialised practices is to speak with certain volume about its prevalence in less commonly viewed 'equitable' and 'fair' arenas. Where research methodologies in sport [of all things] begin to explore its location in the perpetuation of racial processes and formations then they must also be commenting on, and implicating, a society stratified along lines of 'race'. Gloria-Ladson Billings (1998) question *Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education?*...is a question being adapted for many more arenas.

As a topic and symbol of majoritarian obfuscation, sport, like education, law, social and community services, crime, health and any other number of public arenas must not go unquestioned. My research into local government sport revealed policies and practice that were colour-blind, conceptually confused and contradictory (Hylton, 2003). There were glass ceilings, poor diversity at the highest levels of policymaking and amongst senior personnel, which reflected racial processes and formations that reinforced whiteness and the privileges that goes with it. The counterstory was one of black practitioners isolated in local government and with more influence in a voluntary pressure group outside of their councils, funding agents distrustful of black organisations whilst more established organisations received continued funding based upon *merit*. Merit meaning that criteria had been met in an 'objective', 'detached' but not transparent way. Colourblindness is a problem even in sport that reinforces oppression, racial inequality and power relations and therefore an ideal setting for a CRT critique and research. Due to racialisation, widespread institutional racism and racial formations in multiple settings, CRT agendas are not likely to be exhausted in this regard.

### **Trans-national CRT?**

As with most new critical perspectives there is often an element of conceptual jousting, exploration and clarification that still occurs in the US but has typified much of the work in the UK. As CRT has become established as a robust approach to social theorizing and practice in the UK the call for praxis has become stronger (Gillborn, 2011). In the US there have been many authors that have written in a celebratory way about a decade of CRT activity in education, or twenty plus years of concerted CRT activity elsewhere (Lynn and Parker, 2006; Dixson and Rousseau, 2006). In the UK our celebrations are currently about more recent milestone publications from British based CRT scholars after our first international CRT conference (Hylton et al 2011). CRT in the UK and US clearly have different histories and therefore any reflections on CRT research agendas become awkward just because one is more established than the other. However, Guinier and Torres' (2002) view that achieving racial justice and a healthy democratic process is a distinctly American challenge is not strictly accurate.

Guinier and Torres outline a research agenda that is not purely American but one that overarches more specific sociocultural historical issues and events that can differentiate east from west, UK from US. While we must acknowledge our shared past and present, in a postmodern globalised world that rapidly emphasises racialised hegemony and the intersecting politics of 'race', it is not surprising that CRT is being applied in the UK as in the US and elsewhere.

### **Walk the Walk...but how far will you go?**

In addition to conventional research methods, many writers have considered the use of participatory techniques for research purposes in the social sciences. These studies have ranged from ethnographies to assist pedagogy, to writing that has informed the mainstream understanding of the Asian experience of football (cf. Burdsey 2004). Critical ethnographic methods would not be out of place in a CRT methodology, where they enable a reworking of mainstream views on matters to do with 'race' they move from thick description to critical interpretation. These two positions are of equal value in the way CRT has utilised description and critical analysis to juxtapose the everyday with more insightful accounts. The interplay of these accounts for Thomas (1993) present opportunities to prick public awareness of the everyday by offering more thought provoking emancipatory accounts. In this regard, the narrative, chronicles, and storytelling techniques mentioned earlier in this paper have been associated with CRT especially where the black experience has been so misunderstood or ignored that 'hearing' these voices becomes a powerful approach in itself. Chronicles have been popular in CRT as they generally involve accounts that make what Carter (2003) argues the implicit explicit and eschew pseudo-objectivity and neutrality, and often with a twist. The twist occurring as description followed by critique enable alternative readings of the everyday which become as profound as 'seeing the wood for the trees' or in some cases 'fish seeing water'. For example, Matsuda's stories of reflection and action in her campaigns against racist speech acts have empowered lay and professional audiences by giving them confidence from not feeling isolated and alone (Matsuda, Lawrence et al. 1993: 12). Montoya's (2002: 243) use of narrative enables *namely discursive subversions, identity formation, and healing and transformation...* This also occurs with Duncan (2006: 201) who emphasised the ability of stories to allow others to get into the mindset, or see the world through the eyes of those who are oppressed or subjugated. Gillborn (2009) does this through his use of fictional chronicles based on everyday problematics in education. Gillborn's technique, popular in CRT, allows him to sketch out and critique racial processes, thus melding a range of experiences and ideas to forge an antiracist praxis.

Blaisdell's use of an ethnographic approach, termed 'performance ethnography' (Denzin 2003), enabled him to explore the way white teachers resist or ignore colourblindness, white privilege and racial hierarchies. Approaches such as these can,

Engender a methodological environment in which the researcher and the researched co-construct meaning

instead of relying upon processes that dictate analysis and interpretation.  
(Carter 2003: 32)

Similarly, the focus of Blaisdell's conversations with teachers was used to explore liberal notions of education while using the dialogue with them to discuss more critical and therefore political approaches to teaching and learning. His understanding of knowledge as a consequence of racialised processes meant that he used his research to a) inform narrow traditional agendas and views in the sociology of education and b) try to transform liberal practitioner views for more radical ones. Kivel et al (2009: 474) used a similar technique in a critical race ethnography, a merger of ideas from CRT and ethnography, to challenge wider racialised structural issues. They encourage researchers to move from 'describing and presenting "different experiences"...to...grounding those experiences within broader social, cultural discourses of institutional oppression.' Though the key for Blaisdell is how we can use it to not only raise issues in relation to antiracism but from the point of view of praxis, how research can actively challenge racism amongst teachers. For Blaisdell the challenge is to see how we can move on from the 'objective', 'detached' researcher that, in revealing new insights, does not take the opportunity to develop 'effective analytical techniques' to directly challenge social relations. By not explicitly challenging these social relations are researchers being complicit in perpetuating the very behaviours they seek to disrupt? Do they absolve themselves of challenging racism, or are these strategic issues in researching 'race' for transformation? (Blaisdell 2009:1-3). How far to walk the walk...stick or twist?

Ladson Billings and Donnor (2008), and Blaisdell (2009) emphasise this problematic for CRT scholars when they urge scholars not to over-rely on others to take their ideas forward and to promote this activism themselves. Their ultimate point is that CRT's emphasis on social justice and transformation cannot hope that the very people, privileged by racial inequalities are going to be the ones to energise these agendas and change behaviours. In this regard they both make salient points, Blaisdell (2009: 110) states that,

If qualitative researchers rely on other people using their findings to do the work of combating racism...the assumption is that those findings will push the antiracist agenda along [but] ...they may potentially perpetuate the adherence to problematic racial views of their participants [or readers] (Blaisdell, 2009: 110).

And Ladson-Billings and Donnor (2008: 74) posit that,

Scholars who take on the challenge of moral and ethical work cannot rely solely on others to make sense of their work and translate it into usable form.

The empowering of the excluded Other in the transformation of racialised arrangements is a core goal of Pizarro's research for social justice. Pizarro's constant tension in the way he conducted his earlier ethnographic studies was that he felt as though he was still filtering the voice of the subjects as the teller of the story and was conscious of the hypocrisy of these actions. Empowering new voices involves a 'buy-in' to research that speaks to them too by offering the promise/potential for them to influence change. Without this connection then participatory transformation is unlikely. Researchers using CRT may engage in Freirian dialogue, as illustrated by Pizarro (1999), with the subjects contributing to the study, especially where their education has systematically reduced their confidence to offer authoritative views on their social contexts because *experts don't look like them nor come from where they do...do they?* ...though his methodology was innovative, in comparison to more traditional methods, and also because the study included new subjects for research in education, the process of analysis still excluded them. He wanted to include Chicano/a students in the process of the telling of their experiences and analysis of what was important. Therefore, Pizarro (Pizarro 1999: 58) felt it necessary to make his CRT research identifiable by framing it as research *on* empowerment and research *as* empowerment. Flores and Garcia (2009) would argue that a participatory approach that draws upon a CRF and Lat/Crit epistemology could establish the conditions for a transformation of people and individuals, though this takes much reflexivity and understanding of complex processes. This intellectual and grassroots challenge is highlighted by Stovall (2006) in his struggles with (and for) community organizations, secondary schools and the academy. Stovall's documenting of his participation in, and reflection on, community interactions with the establishment, in the development of new education facilities, illustrates some of the difficulties that Pizarro found in adopting a participatory transformative agenda. The need for 'actions following words' is the focus of work by other CRT authors (see also Parker and Stovall, 2004).

### Summary

Carspecken (1996) and Christian (2007) summarise principles attractive to CRT researchers. For instance, Carspecken states the major element of social research is its political engagement making it more likely to make a difference to mainstream agendas. He argues that, critical researchers should be engaged in social and cultural criticism, that there should be recognition of inequality in society, that oppressive dominant forces should be laid bare and challenged, that oppression has to be tackled on more than one front, that mainstream epistemologies, and research agendas, make up part of the forces of oppression. Research that falls into this category are those like Christian's (2007) whose work explores the ethics of resistance in social science. Research that allows us to understand everyday realities and challenges the value neutral, apolitical positivism that is *de rigeur* in many research circles,

...the challenge for those writing culture is not to limit their moral perspectives to their own generic and neutral principles, but to engage the same moral space as the people they study...research strategies are not

assessed... in terms of “experimental robustness”  
but...”vitality and vigour in illuminating how we can  
create human flourishing”  
(Christian 2007: 57)

The notion that the personal, professional and political should be tied into methodological processes is one that supports a major thrust of enlightened meaningful critical research. Such a shift is one that is not taken lightly but one that engages the researcher in a process of identification with the subject that leaves the reader in no doubt that a political position has been taken within the framework of ethical knowledge generation and social transformation. The researcher’s ability to exacerbate power differentials even in critical research can be alleviated when CRT centres the subject, and ensures that research is for, rather than on, the subjects in question, and the researcher is located within the study (Bhopal 2000). The reflexivity necessary for a researcher to ‘enter’ the research and adopt a political stance towards their study enables them to ...examine and question the differences and similarities which exist between the researcher and the researched and how this affects access, the influence of personal experience and power (Bhopal 2000: 70). A CRT technique is identifiable in Bhopal’s work due to her use of intersectionality in recognising the overlaying of social factors on social relations both inside and outside of research. Intersectionality, racialised power processes, and reflexivity are core organising CRT concepts underpinned by emancipatory politics.

No trite answer is offered to the question ‘*what is a CRT methodology?*’ because that in itself would reflect a pedantic essentialism anathema to critical race theorists. A CRT methodology must embrace not only the spirit of CRT but practical liberatory, transformative elements. The *spirit of CRT* is a useful notion here because CRT is not theoretically abstract, nor dogmatically defined, neither is it for armchair theorists. For example, Matsuda et al. (1993) would describe a CRT methodology as one that is grounded in the experience of our collective realities. More specifically, a CRT methodology should demonstrate a response to challenging subordination and oppression....*it is informed by active struggle and in turn informs that struggle* (Matsuda et al, 1993). These are principles that can guide any combination of research techniques from the traditional to more challenging cutting edge methods. So just as CRT methodologies can facilitate knowledge of racialised relations and activism to transform them and other forms of oppression, if poorly considered they can also stymie these activities (Tuhiwai Smith 2006:b).

Where a CRT framework is only partially applied in theory rather than practice then critical researchers could be accused of *talking the talk, but not walking the walk*. Researching racialised problematics ultimately leads scholars to a point where they must agitate for change and unfortunately be willing to defend positions that are marginal, challenging and sometimes plain unpopular. All things considered there is no positive spin on ‘race’ and racism because ‘race’ is a construct that is used to differentiate, (dis)advantage, and (dis)empower each time it is uncritically invoked. Even positive social transformation will involve remarking upon these racialised concepts and processes and to this end, simply,

involves telling someone something about themselves/the world that needs to change.

Key considerations for CRT that emerge from the work of CRT researchers like Blaisdell, Ladson-Billings, Kivel et al is how CRT methodologies can not only shift from making important theoretical and conceptual contributions that disrupt racial processes but also how they can challenge them directly. In many cases CRT methodologies force researchers to contradict what is often viewed as sound ethical practice<sup>3</sup> through encouraging a more central positioning in the research process; “researchers as part of the process, in practice, look like this”. Some researchers will have to fight their natural urges, based upon years of training where they have been constantly told to locate themselves outside of the research process, to now locate themselves, as social beings, inside the research process. Dialogue with researchers, far from leading the respondents, retains elements of heuristics, and dialogic performance that encourages an inclusive and participative approach.

CRT methodologies are focussed on philosophical and ethical imperatives that explore, confront and change negative racialised relations. They may also be identifiable by their willingness to challenge the fundamental basis of CRT’s key categories. ‘Race’, ethnicity, racism and related issues of antiracism, identities, and intersectionality are arbitrary and laden with ‘everyday’ ambiguities. An acceptance of the pervasiveness of racism and racialisation in society is not necessarily an acceptance of the notion of ‘race’ and its related social categories. CRT methodologies must navigate the topography of racialised language in a way that is unambiguous because ‘race’ is a paradox in that we know it is socially constructed, changes over time, and has no scientific basis. CRT researchers must then be wary of these ambiguities in light of the ‘reality’ of ‘race’ in the vernacular and our everyday lives.

Figure 1 emphasises some of the key considerations for researchers using a CRT methodology. They are in no particular order but are points and issues that must be balanced in a rationale underpinning a CRT methodology. This list is not exhaustive but indicative of the way key ideas from CRT need to pervade a discussion of methodology. A methodology is the point at which theory and practice merge and so the defence of a story of how CRT underpins the practical aspects of a research study must be cognisant of this delicate balance. Parker et al (1999: 27) offer a message of solidarity with those adopting a CRT methodology,

Adopting and adapting CRT as a framework [...] means that we will have to expose racism [...] and propose radical solutions for addressing it. We may have to defend a radical approach to democracy that seriously undermines the privilege of those who

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<sup>3</sup> Due to conventional ethical guidelines relating to detached, objective and neutral researcher.

have so skilfully carved that privilege into the foundation of the nation.

CRT methodologies should be identifiable by their innovation in the methods that they use to explore social relations and racialised problematics. However, CRT research methods are ostensibly tools available for use in any social investigation so there must be other checks and balances for a methodology using such a framework in a plethora of settings and contexts. For example, Parker et al (1999) emphasise a critical race consciousness to guard against ahistorical approaches to research; Glover (2009) emphasises asking new questions in approaches to researching 'race'; Blaisdell (2009) and others like Ladson-Billings and Donnor (2008) encourage a researcher-activist approach; others encourage an empowering participatory one (Denzin 2003; Pizarro 1999; Stovall 2006). Pizarro (1999) emphasises the participatory and transformative element of research, arguing that there must be discernible social justice measures to establish the strength, or relative worth of research. Philosophically, Pizarro's ideas have much support within CRT and those conducting critical research, though the significance of the kinds of change and transformation are also interesting and pressing questions for further deliberation. Suffice it to say that CRT methodologies can engender transformative capacity. Yet how attractive they become to new generations of researchers starts with a consistent and persuasive defence of this potential.

**Figure 1: Key Considerations for Critical Race Theory Methodologies**

- The 'spirit' of CRT
- No methods are inherently CRT though some have more utility than others
- Social justice focus
- A challenge to oppression and subordination
- Strategic challenge to racism/Challenge convention
- Centre the black voice/black experience
- Research is for, not on, the subjects in question.
- Conceptually strategic/pragmatic/anti-essentialist/
- Intersectionality: strategic incorporation of class, gender, sexuality and other oppressive social categories, however they are less likely to be foregrounded in the first instance.
- Counter-storytelling
- Praxis oriented.
- Activist scholarship
- Participatory Approach
- Researcher as part of the process
- Challenges the passive reproduction of established questions and practices.

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